



and the condition of the airplane, inside and out, would probably have been evaluated as being at least “good”. While the Dacron (Ceconite) fabric on the wings still easily passed the punch test, the white and red paint (dope) on these had deteriorated and was unattractive; but, there was no obvious sign anywhere of any serious metal corrosion. Previous owners had already installed wing leading-edge landing lights (the original 140s had ineffective retractable lights located on the bottom of the left wing), and an oil filter (the originals had none).

When I was preparing to purchase a vintage “used” airplane, my tail-wheel instructor advised me to buy something that cost less than I thought I could afford, and then to save any left-over money for all the little stuff that would eventually need to be replaced and/or up-dated. This was good advice! A detailed list of the replacements and up-datings that were done for 663 under my ownership would be too extensive to include here, but the following are examples: The old Ceconite fabric on the wings was replaced with polyester Polyfiber fabric (and the wing repainted), the cabin and seats were reupholstered and a new headliner was installed, the old seat belts were replaced with new ones that included shoulder belts (the old ones were lap-only), the original electrical “pull” starter was replaced by one operated by a push button, and brakes were installed for the right seat (they were originally only on the left). In addition, there was a whole bunch of other “little things”, like a new radio, a couple of new instruments, and a new side-rear window (the original had somehow become frosted over), and so forth.

I did the recovering (and repainting) of the wing in my garage at home (supervised occasionally by a certified A&P mechanic!) The techniques of doing this were easy for someone who has put fabric on several large models, but the amount of work and time

involved was surprising. I originally figured that the job could be done in a month; it actually took more like 9 months. It was definitely worth all the effort, however, since this did a lot to upgrade the condition of the aircraft (and besides, with silver paint on the fabric that is a fair match with the unpainted portions of the metal fuselage, it looks really nice).

I also found that a fabric cover on the wing has some less than obvious advantages. While the old fabric was off I spent considerable time “rebuilding” the metal framework, including replacing stuff, reinforcing all four aileron hinges, repairing an aileron bellcrank, replacing a rib and straightening and patching others, rewiring the navigation lights, and so forth. It seems to me that with an all-metal wing, once the sheeting is riveted in place, inspection and access would be limited and difficult.

As it turned out, a Cessna 140 was ideal for my age-limited piloting abilities and aviation interests. 663 is a wonderful airplane to fly with absolutely no “bad habits”. (*I too can attest to that fact!*) Control pressures are light (aileron control in an Aeronca Champ, for example, is much heavier), adverse yaw is minimal, slips are easy and effective, stalls are gentle and straight forward, and early spin recovery is almost automatic. While the common tendency to tighten steep turns does occur, it is easily corrected with a little reverse aileron control. Because of excellent visibility over the nose, this airplane may be the easiest of all tail-draggers to taxi, take off, and land.



While the spring steel landing gear may actually increase the height of landing bounces, I’ve never found this to be a problem. In calm air, once properly trimmed, it nicely flies “hands off” and will self-recover from any normal “up-sets”. In fact, with two people on board, very adequate flying can be done by simply “leaning” left or right or forward and back.